

THE OFFICE OF THE *OIKISTIKOS*: FIVE SEALS IN THE DUMBARTON OAKS COLLECTION

JOHN W. NESBITT

THE οἰκιστικός ranks among the more obscure functionaries in Byzantine civil administration. The original character of his office, together with his specific duties, is not clear, and while the position was important, it underwent a process of development which is not well understood. Five seals in the

Dumbarton Oaks Collection, one of a *notarios* of the *oikistikos* and four whose owners were *oikistikoi*, may help to clarify some details about the position. Two are of particular interest because they offer new information concerning this official.

DUMBARTON OAKS SEAL COLLECTION:

1. Acc. No. 58.106.1341 (figs. 1a–b)

Lead; diam. 25 mm. Good condition; worn on the obverse; chipped on reverse, in left and right margins.

Date: tenth/eleventh century.

Obv. Rosace, within double border. On circumference: + ΚΞ<BO>ΗΘΕΙ<ΤΩCΩ>ΔΟΝΛΩ:
+ Κ(ύρι)ε <βο>ήθει [τῷ σῷ] δούλω.

Rev. Inscription:

+KONC
TANT, ANΘV
ΠΑΤΡΙΚ, R, A
ΠΑΘ, VK, T, K.
CSEΠ, TX.
CO.

+Κονσ-
ταντ(ίνω) άνθυ-
<π(ήτω)> πατρικ(ίω) β(ασιλικῷ) (πρωτο)-
<σ>παθ<αρίω) ύκ(ισ)τ(ι)κ[ῷ]-
ς (καί) ἐπ(ι) τ(οῦ) Χ[ρ]-
<υ>σο[τρικλίνου]

+ Κ(ω)νσταντίνω άνθυπάτω, πατρικίω, βασιλικῷ πρωτοσπαθαρίω, (οἱ)κιστικ(ῷ) καί ἐπὶ τοῦ Χρυσοτρικλίνου.

The engraver slipped and presents *oikistikos* in the nominative rather than dative case. Such instances are not uncommon and the termination offers no real difficulty. The reading of the title is secure, although one cannot be certain about the reading of the final line. The last title could be: ἐπ(ι) τοῦ [β]εσ[τ(ι)αρίου].

2. Acc. No. 58.106.2219 (figs. 2a–b)

Lead; diam. 26 mm. Good state of preservation; part of inscription is outside field; part is chipped, in right margin.

Date: tenth/eleventh century.

Obv. Bust of St. Nicholas; inscription:

<ΘΝΙ>—ΚΟ—ΛΑ—Ο, : <‘Ο ἄ(γιος) Νι>κόλαο(ς).

Rev. Inscription:

IT, ✠
ΠΑΤ, ΟΙ
CΤΗΚ, ΚΡ
ΕΠΙΤ, ΙΠΠ, Δ
ST, ΡΘΣΛΛ
Ρ,

ἐπὶ τοῦ Χρ(υσο) [(τρι)κλ(ίνου)]
〈ύ〉πάτ(ω) οἰ(κι)-
στηκ(ϙ) κρ(ιτ(ῆ))
ἐπὶ τοῦ ἱππ(ο)δ(ρόμου)
(καὶ) τ(ῶν) Βου(κε)λλ(α)-
ρ(ίων)

... ἐπὶ τοῦ Χρυσотρικλίνου, ὑπάτῳ, οἰκιστ(ι)κῷ, κριτῇ ἐπὶ τοῦ ἱπποδρόμου καὶ τῶν Βουκελλαρίων.

3. Acc. No. 58.106.5072 (figs. 3a-b)

Lead; diam. 29 mm.; field 24 mm. Corroded, but letters remain quite visible; hole in center.

Date: eleventh century.

Obv. Inscription:

Θ̅Κ̅Ε̅Ρ, Θ,
ΤΩCΩΔ̅Θ̅
ΘΕΟΦΥΛΑ
ΚΤ. REC
ΤΑΡΧΗ

Θ(εοτό)κε βο(ή)θ(ει)
τῷ σῷ δούλ(ω)
Θεοφυλά-
κτ[ω] βεσ-
τάρχη

Rev. Inscription:

— ∴ —
ΚΡΙΤΗ
ΜΟΙΚΙCΤΙ
ΚΩS. ΗΡΩ
ΚΩΜΩ

— ∴ —
κριτῇ
μ(ε)γ(άλω) οἰκιστι-
κῷ (καὶ) [γ]ηρω-
κώμω

Θεοτόκε βοήθει τῷ σῷ δούλῳ Θεοφυλάκτῳ βεστάρχη, κριτῇ, μεγάλῳ οἰκιστικῷ καὶ γηρ(ο)κ(ό)μῳ.

4. Acc. No. 55.1.2125 (figs. 4a-b)

Lead; diam. 20 mm. Excellent condition; slight chip on obverse, in left margin.

Date: eleventh century, second half.

Obv. Inscription:

+Κ̅Ε̅Β̅Θ
ΤΩCΩΔ̅Θ̅Λ,
ΤΕΦΑΝΩ̅Α
ΒΕCΤΗΟΙΚΙ
CΤΙΚΩ
— . —

Κ(ύρι)ε βο(ή)θ(ει)
τῷ σῷ δούλ(ω)
〈Σ〉τεφάνω (πρωτο)-
βέστη οἰκι-
στικῷ
— . —

Rev. Inscription:

— . —
ΤΩNNE
ΩΝΟΡΘΩ
CΕΩNSKPI
ΤΗΤΩNAP
ΜΕΝΙΑΚ,
— . —

— . —
τῶν νέ-
ων ὀρθω-
σέων (καὶ) κρι-
τῇ τῶν Ἀρ-
μενιακ(ῶν)
— . —

+Κύριε βοήθει τῷ σῷ δούλῳ Στεφάνῳ πρωτοβέστη, οἰκιστικῷ τῶν νέων ὀρθωσέων καὶ κριτῇ τῶν Ἀρμενιακῶν.

The dignity of *protovestēs* appears in the eleventh century, when we find datable references from the 1070's and 1080's. It disappears in the twelfth century. It seems to me reasonable to date this seal to the second half of the eleventh century, probably to 1050–70.

5. Acc. No. 58.106.2984 (figs. 5a–b)

Lead; diam. 25 mm. Good condition; portion of inscription is outside field.

Date: tenth/eleventh century.

Obv. Bust of St. John the Baptist; inscription:

⟨ΘΙΩ⟩Ο–Π–Δ: <‘Ο ἄ(γιος) ’Ιω(άννης)⟩ ὁ Πρ(ό)δ(ρομος).

On the circumference: ΩCΩΔΘΛ: < ? Κύριε βοήθει τ>ϣ̣ ϣ̣̣ δούλ(ω).

Rev. Inscription:

NOTAPI
TOVOIKI
TIKOV

νοταρί(ϣ̣̣)
τοῦ οἰκί(σ)-
τικοῦ

In terms of the Saint's bust and the arrangement of letters this seal is similar to the design of a seal which G. Schlumberger reproduces (*Sigillographie de l'empire byzantin* [Paris, 1884], 559). His seal reads: Δαβίδ βασιλικῶ νοταρίω τοῦ οἰκιστικοῦ.

What is known about the *oikistikos* from literary sources and documents can be summarized briefly. The *oikistikos* does not appear in the earliest list of ranks, the *Taktikon Uspenskij* (842–43), but he is mentioned in the *Treatise of Philotheos* (899) and the *Taktikon of the Escorial* (971–75).¹ Chrysobulls attest the use of the title until the late decades of the eleventh century,² the last datable mention occurring in 1088. At first, the *oikistikos* was a subordinate functionary of the λογοθέτης τοῦ γενικοῦ (the logothete of the public treasury).³ By the eleventh century, the *oikistikos* had gained in prominence and directed an independent office with a number of subordinates, the *logariastai*,

notarioi (see our seal no. 5, a *notarios* of the *oikistikos*), *chartularioi*, etc.⁴ The *Fiscal Treatise* describes one of the responsibilities of the office. Discussing properties which had been accorded tax exemptions, the treatise states that in the reign of Leo VI (886–912) such properties were summarily registered in the χαρτῖα of the bureau of the *oikistikos*.⁵

Sigillography advances our knowledge of this office. As noted above, by the eleventh century the office of the *oikistikos* had grown from a subordinate to an independent bureau. Our seal no. 3 apprises us of a further stage in development. It bears the inscription of a certain Theophylakt, *vestarches*, judge, grand *oikistikos*, and *gerokomos*. For the first time we hear of a *megas*, or “grand,” *oikistikos*, implying that the office has increased significantly in personnel. The grand *oikistikos* directs a number of “lesser” *oikistikoi*. It is interesting to note that in the case of two seals the owner is both an *oikistikos* and a thematic judge. The anonymous owner of seal no. 2 is an *oikistikos* and a judge of the Hippodrome and of the theme of the Boukel-

¹ N. Oikonomidès, *Les listes de préséance byzantines des IX^e et X^e siècles* (Paris, 1972), 113, 155, 233, 273. No mention is made in the *Taktikon Benešević* (934–44).

² *Actes de Lavra*, eds. P. Lemerle, A. Guilou, and N. Svoronos, I (Paris, 1970), no. 32 (1057), p. 194; no. 33 (1060), p. 198; no. 36 (1074), p. 210; no. 38 (1079), p. 219; no. 43 (1081), p. 240; no. 44 (1082), p. 244; no. 45 (1084), p. 247; no. 48 (1086), p. 259. F. Miklosich and J. Müller eds., *Acta et diplomata Graeca medii aevi sacra et profana*, IV (Vienna, 1871), no. x (1049), p. 316; *ibid.*, V (1887), no. II (1045), p. 4; no. v (1074), p. 138; no. VI (1079), p. 9; *ibid.*, VI (1890), no. v (1079), p. 21; no. VI (1079), p. 23; no. VIII (1087), p. 28; no. XIII (1088), p. 48.

³ Oikonomidès, *op. cit.*, 113 and 313. See also J. B. Bury, *The Imperial Administrative System in the Ninth Century* (London, 1911), 88; R. Guilland, “Les logothètes,” *REB*, 29 (1971), 15.

⁴ See the remarks of F. Dölger, “Beiträge zur Geschichte der byzantinischen Finanzverwaltung, besonders des 10. und 11. Jahrhunderts,” *ByzArch*, 9 (1927), 91; V. Laurent, “Sceaux byzantins inédits,” *BZ*, 33 (1933), 356–57. For seals of subordinates, see Schlumberger, *op. cit.*, 559; B. A. Pančenko, “Katalog’ molivdovulov,” *Izvestija russkago arheologičeskago instituta v’ Constantinopolě*, 9 (Sofia, 1904), 342.

⁵ Dölger, *op. cit.*, 117 and 91.

larioi, while Stephan, the owner of seal no. 4, is an *oikistikos* and judge of the theme of the Armeniakoi. The mention on these seals of the charge of *oikistikos* in conjunction with another charge where the name of a theme appears strongly suggests that at least on occasion the bureau had representatives in the provinces. This notion gains further credibility from a description of an *oikistikos* in a document of 1049: "the *oikistikos* who is the judge in the theme of the Thrakesians."⁶

The seal of Stephan the *oikistikos* reveals that in the eleventh century the sphere of the office's responsibilities further expanded. He is called specifically an *oikistikos* τῶν νέων ὁρθώσεων. Before proceeding further, an explanation of the word ὁρθώσεις is in order. The word has a general meaning of "a straightening," "a correction," or "a rectification," but, more importantly, a technical meaning: the reimposition of taxes on a piece of land. We find this technical sense of the word in the *Fiscal Treatise*.⁷ The term applies to instances where emigrants return and again assume ownership of their land, but to encourage the return of farmers to their land, the reimposition of taxes (ὁρθώσεις) proceeds according to a gradual schedule of payments; the whole tax obligation is not reimposed all at once. In view of the farmers' penury, the first inspector (the *epoptes*) imposes only a sixth of their tax portion, the second inspector a half, and the third inspector a third. In the case of Stephan, the phrase τῶν νέων ὁρθώσεων relates to this procedure. Moreover, it reflects a change in taxation. The phrase implies an alteration in the ὁρθώσεις: the reimposition of a new form of taxation, in contrast to the old; but just how it differed is a matter of speculation. Quite possibly there was a change in the schedule for the reimposition of taxes. The important point, for purposes of this paper, is that an *oikistikos* supervised this alteration.

⁶ . . . ὁ τὰ τοῦ θέματος τῶν Θρακησίων δικάζων οἰκιστικός . . . : Miklosich and Müller, *op. cit.*, IV, 316.

⁷ Dölger, *op. cit.*, 119. Cf. G. Ostrogorsky, *Die ländliche Steuergemeinde des byzantinischen Reiches im X. Jahrhundert* (Amsterdam, 1969), 75. The word also appears in its technical sense in an *isokodikon* of Radolibus; N. Svoronos, *Recherches sur le cadastre byzantin et la fiscalité aux XI^e et XII^e siècles* (Athens-Paris, 1959), 131.

I do not believe that Stephan's activities represent a basic departure from the long-term historical responsibilities of the bureau which he represents. His charge involves, it seems to me, fiscal registration and tax tabulation. Such, it appears, were the general duties of the office in its early phases. Oikonomidès and Guiland have focused on the root meaning of *oikistikos* and have attempted to define the original cast of the office in terms of the word's derivation. Both have suggested that the word is connected with *oikoi*, meaning crown property.⁸ According to Oikonomidès, the office was connected with land registration. The *oikistikos* kept a separate register of crown property. What is striking about Stephan's activities is the specific area in which he discharges his duties of fiscal registration, since the ὁρθώσεις is a general tax pertaining to all categories of property. It is impossible to explain how an *oikistikos* should come to superintend a general tax. I can only offer this observation. We know that the office of the *oikistikos* kept summary registrations of lands which had been exempted from the basic tax. It could be that in time the bureau began to keep records of a wider category in regard to lands which did not produce tax revenue, such as those which were granted short- or long-term tax relief and land which had fallen vacant. If this is true, then the recording of tax reimpositions would simply be the reverse of the maintenance of records on vacant land, and the task of reimposing taxes would reasonably fall within the scope of duties of an *oikistikos*, as our seal of Stephan attests.

In summary, I think it fair to say that our seals show that the office attained a greater level of prominence than has been generally accepted. Although we cannot better explain the origins of the office, its development is more clearly revealed. We know more concerning the increase in its personnel and the expansion of its area of activities. However, the interpretation to be placed on the latter will no doubt remain a matter of debate.⁹

⁸ Oikonomidès, *op. cit.*, 313; Guiland, *op. cit.*, 15.

⁹ I should like to express here my thanks to Prof. Oikonomidès for reading this paper in manuscript and for giving generously of his time in discussing it.



a. Obverse



b. Reverse

1. D.O. 58.106.1341



a. Obverse



b. Reverse

2. D.O. 58.106.2219



a. Obverse



b. Reverse

3. D.O. 58.106.5072



a. Obverse



b. Reverse

4. D.O. 55.1.2125



a. Obverse



b. Reverse

5. D.O. 58.106.2984